

Cinema Paradiso



Bringing Film into the Content Areas

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First and Foremost....

- ❖ Download the Nearpod student app (free) from the App Store on your iPad



- ❖ Download the IMDb app (free) and get ready to become obsessed :)



Studying Film vs. Watching Movies

- ❖ Watching movies is largely passive, which is not to be confused with “negative.” It simply means there is little action required on the part of the viewer other than munching on popcorn and laughing at the fart jokes or putting their fingers over their eyes at the scary parts.
- ❖ Studying film involves active engagement in the cinematic experience, the film being the exchange of a visual/audial story from a written one. It is the cinematic equivalent of Louise Rosenblatt’s iconic **Reader Response** approach to literature which gives the student ownership over their own interpretation of a work.

Reader Response approach

- ❖ The special meaning, and more particularly, the **submerged associations** that these words and images have for the individual reader will **largely determine what the work communicates to him**. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. (Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1938 pp. 30-31)

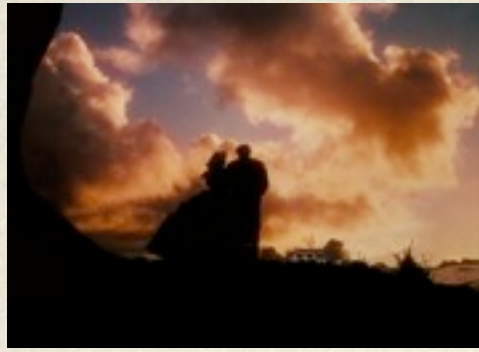
What does that mean in a film?

- ❖ Have you ever read a short story or a book multiple times and discovered new things each time? Character motivations, foreshadowing, nuances of tone....there is always something different that we didn't see before.
- ❖ It's the same with a film. With the best films, there is always a line or a scene that the viewer sees in new ways with repeated viewings.
- ❖ In the same sense, the reader/viewer approaches books/films differently as they get older and gain new experiences and knowledge. They respond differently as their perspective evolves.

Efferent vs. Aesthetic

- ❖ “When responding from the **efferent** stance (from the Latin *effere* to carry away), readers are motivated by specific needs to acquire information; they basically just want to understand what the text is saying.
- ❖ On the other hand, when readers are responding in the **aesthetic** stance, their own unique lived-through experience or engagement with a text is primary.”
- ❖ When reading or viewing a work, students constantly switch between both stances (Church, 1997, <http://www.vccaedu.org/inquiry/inquiry-spring97/illchur.html>).

English-Language Arts



Tone, Mood in a Film



- ❖ **Tone**: the attitude of the author (or screenwriter/director) towards a subject
- ❖ **Mood**: the atmosphere of a scene as felt by the audience
- ❖ You are now going to watch a scene from a film in which the tone and mood are very intense. As you watch, think about the **efferent stance**. What is happening with the central character? How do the supporting characters respond?
- ❖ Now, take the **aesthetic stance**. What is your response to the film? How do your prior experiences/knowledge influence this response?

Clip 1: Steel Magnolias (1989)

- ❖ As you watch, think about the **efferent stance**. What is happening with the central character? How do the supporting characters respond (Level 1)?
- ❖ Literary elements:
 - ❖ *Plot: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution*
 - ❖ *Characterization: appearance, behavior, attitude*
- ❖ Now, take the **aesthetic stance**. What is your response to the film? How do your prior experiences/knowledge influence this response (Level 3/4)?
- ❖ How do perspectives shift?
 - ❖ *Age*
 - ❖ *Personal experience*
 - ❖ *Film Knowledge*

Always obtain parental and administrative permission to screen films in class. The release form is in the Faculty Handbook of your campus.)

Mise-en-Scène

Definition: the arrangement of actors and scenery on a stage for a theatrical production; the physical setting of an action (as of a narrative or motion picture)

- ❖ *framing, blocking of characters*
- ❖ *movement of the camera and characters*
- ❖ *lighting*
- ❖ *set design, props*
- ❖ *background details*
- ❖ *sound (diegetic and non-diegetic)*
- ❖ *costumes*



Clip 2: What Lies Beneath (2000)



- ❖ Notice the initial tracking camera shot of the clip from *What Lies Beneath* (2000), as if it was right in front of Claire (Michelle Pfeiffer), leading her towards the bathroom.
- ❖ Keep an eye on the decor, furnishings, camera level (birds' eye, floor, etc.)
- ❖ Watch Claire's mannerisms in the scene. What does this reveal about her personality?
- ❖ Look at the beautiful framing of the bathroom as Claire opens the door. How does this add to the tone and mood?
- ❖ Notice the score and different sound effects in the scene. What atmosphere do they create?

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Mise-en-Scène activity

- ❖ Volunteers for three scenes
- ❖ Each scene features the same dialogue
- ❖ Arrange the chairs in scene #1 in an authoritative structure, with one chair in the center and the others surrounding it. Shine a light from behind on the central chair. The narrator will stand and speak over the central chair.
- ❖ Scene #2 will have two desks facing each other and the narrator will face the other person. The light will face the center of the desks.
- ❖ Scene #3 will have two chairs next to each other and the participants will not face each other directly.

History

History in Film?

- ❖ History depends on two things: **perspective** and **agenda**.
- ❖ Who's writing our history? What are their backgrounds, purposes, beliefs?
- ❖ What are their influences?
- ❖ “History is written by those who have hanged heroes” (Braveheart, 1995).



Critical History



❖ Possible subject:

❖ **Explorers vs. Savages: Who is civilized in a “New World?”**

- ❖ *Pocahontas* (1995, dir. Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg)
- ❖ *The New World* (2005, dir. Terrence Malick)

❖ Possible activities:

- ❖ Students can compose a series of journal entries from the point of view of a conquistador or other European explorer in which they consider the purpose of their journey (i.e. Glory, God, or Gold? Personal wealth/fame or devotion to a monarch?), their initial enthusiasm, the ensuing disillusion and despair, and the fate of their mission. Include not just the facts but their own physical feelings, emotions, thoughts, fears, hopes, etc.

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Critical History



❖ Possible subject:

- ❖ **Wartime from both fronts:
American Revolution, American
Civil War, Texas Revolution, et.**
- ❖ *Glory* (1989, dir. Edward Zwick)
- ❖ *The Civil War* (1990, dir. Ken Burns)
- ❖ *Gettysburg* (1993, dir. Ronald F. Maxwell)
- ❖ *The Patriot* (2000, dir. Roland Emmerich)
- ❖ *The Alamo* (2004, dir. John Lee Hancock; 1960, dir. John Wayne)

❖ Possible activities:

- ❖ After viewing different films, students will adopt the persona of a soldier (private, general, etc.), a nurse/surgeon/doctor, or a townspeople at the site of a historic battle and write a letter to a relative or friend back home in which they describe the war at hand and their thoughts/feelings about it. They must provide evidence on three levels: **Level One** (what are they seeing, smelling, feeling, tasting, hearing); **Level Two** (what was their opinion on the war at its start vs. their opinion now); **Level Three** (their hope - or lack thereof - for the future and where the fate of the nation lies).

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Critical History

❖ Possible subject:

- ❖ **Treatment of American Indian in film from Silent Era, to Golden Age, to anti-Establishment 60s/70s, to revisionist 90s/2000s.**

- ❖ *Davy Crockett* (1955, dir. Norman Foster)
- ❖ *The Searchers* (1956, dir. John Ford)
- ❖ *Dances with Wolves* (1990, dir. Kevin Costner)
- ❖ *Smoke Signals* (1998, dir. Chris Eyre)

❖ Possible activities:

- ❖ While they are viewing scenes from films of different cinematic eras, students should chart the characterization of the American Indian over the years. They should look at their dress and appearance, behavior, actions toward explorers/settlers.
- ❖ How has the caricatured portrayal of American Indians affected their culture as they are seen by the public?
- ❖ This would be an excellent part of an interdisciplinary unit with ELA on stereotypes and racism in the media.

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Current
Events:
*What do
films reflect
about our
society and
what is
happening
within it?*



Justice reigns at end of trilogy

REVIEW BY BROOKE CORSO

As I walked into a darkened theater showing *The Dark Knight Rises* on Friday, July 20, I headed for my preferred seat in front of the horizontal bars that allow me to put my feet up so I can write notes throughout the film. Immediately, one of my movie companions expressed concern that we would be too exposed in that location, but I refused to move though my stomach fluttered for about the first thirty minutes. It angered me that I should feel nervous during a film, that so many people had been hurt or killed in Colorado earlier that morning by a man who capitalized on the film's violence to catch the theater audience off guard and instantly became both infamous and ubiquitous. By that evening, the young man (whose name doesn't deserve mention in this review) was all over the news, which by my second viewing of the film on Sunday had started reporting on every minute detail of his life. He will forever be associated with this film — whether that was his malicious intent, I do not yet know.

Christopher Nolan has said that *A Tale of Two Cities*, the French Revolution-era novel by Charles Dickens, provided the foundation for the last installment of his Batman trilogy. Anyone with even a high-school background in Dickens can see why: social unrest, political corruption, and mob mentalities plague

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the bloated Gotham, eight years after Harvey Dent's assumed murder by the Caped Crusader who has since disappeared. Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) has grown increasingly withdrawn from the high society he used to frequent, and his reputation has reached Howard Hughes levels of notoriety. He is physically and emotionally fragile, faithfully attended by his manservant Alfred (a tearful Michael Caine) almost as much by guilt as by duty, both men unable or unwilling to atone for their pasts.

Upon this surface-clean city, supposedly rid of its organized crime

thanks to the stalwart Lieutenant Gordon (Gary Oldman) and his Dent Act, descends a new villain who can see the chinks in the armor. He is Bane, who takes advantage of the vacancies left by the now incarcerated criminal underground by constructing his own labyrinthine network of mayhem under Gotham's streets. I was reminded of the character Rorschach from Zack Snyder's *Watchmen*: "Once a man has seen society's black underbelly, he can never turn his back on it. Never pretend, like you do, that it doesn't exist." Only Gordon and an intense young cop, John Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), seem anxious of dark things lurking beneath Gotham's

surface. Both Nolan and the actor playing Bane, Tom Hardy, had the monumental task of presenting a villain who could measure up to the Oscar-winning performance of the Joker by Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*. Whereas the Joker was lithe in form and manic in temperament, Bane's body is hulking and brawny, his moves like that of an Olympic wrestler. Instead of face paint, he wears a metal breathing apparatus that obscures all but his eyes which never look away from his opponent. The Joker had a weaselly, nasal voice that turned to gravel when he attacked; conversely, Bane has a fluid baritone that is almost as oratorical as it is ominous.

Anne Hathaway had similarly tough shoes to fill in the role of Catwoman/Selina Kyle. Michelle Pfeiffer's slinky, husky-voiced 1992 version was iconic; Halle Berry vamped it up in the miserable spinoff twelve years later and the only compliment I can give is that she looked good. Hathaway still dons the skintight bodysuit with killer stilettos, but she is less of a loose cannon and more of an impressionable opportunist whose hotheaded naiveté gets her mixed up with the wrong people.

In the final chapter of the Batman trilogy, Christopher Nolan has made fire an element of purification as well as destruction. To the true hero, it will bring his redemption. To the miscreant, both fictitious and real, it will lead to his fall.

The only other female role is that of Miranda Tate, played by Oscar winner and Nolan alum Marion Cotillard, as a rich investor in Wayne Enterprises and potential love interest for Bruce.

In the eight years since Batman's disappearance, both Gotham and Bruce Wayne have been digging

themselves into the red (the city through its decadence and the playboy through experimental science projects). Its structures have become shackles, to quote a line from the film, and the disparity between the classes has created a powder keg at which Bane gleefully holds a match

See stars.
Every WEEKEND.

capable of mass destruction. "The fire rises," he assures his cohorts as Wayne is banished to his Gethsemane and Bane prepares a reckoning that will have the people of Gotham "clamoring over each other in hopes of the sun."

There are bound to be conflicting opinions about just what that reckoning is for, and as many claims of underlying political agendas. Do I think this film recognizes the discord among political ideologies in modern society?

Yes. It warns against the dangers of allowing any ethos to take the place of individual thought and reason, of passively giving into groupthink, and foregoing accountability of the actions of oneself and others. As history has shown, submissive allegiance to a social or political movement can allow despots to prey on the oppressed through fear and propaganda. As the pompous, doomed Marquis St. Evremonde advises in the Dickens novel, "repression is the only lasting philosophy. The dark deference of fear and slavery... (will) keep the dogs obedient to the whip, as long as this roof... (shuts) out the sky" (Book Two, Chapter 9). Bane assures Batman that "there can be

no true despair without hope," and thus he "will feed Gotham hope to poison their souls." The latter days of the French Revolution play heavily in the film as Gotham's symbols of decadence are demolished, institutions are raided, and tribunals punish those who oppose the new "anonymous government."

Bane lurks in the shadows and corners like Robespierre in this new Reign of Terror. However, his aim is not to bring about a social revolution, but rather to let Gotham destroy itself through anarchy.

Society, or civilization, may be the theme of *The Dark Knight Rises*. Gotham itself has become as much a character in the films as Bruce Wayne has, and the two have become wary bedfellows who sleep with one eye open. In order to be saved, literally and spiritually, the two have to trust each other — as much a belief in the symbol as in what it represents. In the final chapter of the Batman trilogy, Christopher Nolan has made fire an element of purification as well as destruction.

To the true hero, it will bring his redemption. To the miscreant, both fictitious and real, it will lead to his fall. [A]



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Current Events

► MOVIE REVIEW

The Campaign

BY BROOKE CORSO

"War has rules, mud wrestling has rules — politics has no rules" was the 1996 quote from H. Ross Perot that led in this star vehicle for Will Ferrell and Zach Galifianakis. Mere months before the 2012 U.S. Presidential election, this political satire comes at the end of a long, hot summer of partisan campaigns of which media expertise is paramount.

All politicians practice image control — this is not a new skill by any means — but in an age where anyone with a Twitter can call themselves a pundit and the breakneck speed of blogs and paparazzi releases often leads to sensationalism over validity and truth, they must also manipulate their image so that truths and lies run through the same filter.

I remember an episode of *Seinfeld* when George Costanza tells Jerry, "Just remember, it's not a lie...if you believe it." Believability is the key to a political satire, and this is where *The Campaign* falls victim to its own outrageousness.

Will Ferrell is Cam Brady, the Democratic incumbent in a North Carolina Congressional district who is about to enjoy his fifth unopposed term. He behaves like a bratty teenager to his staff and a suave, pontificating word-smith in public. His slogan is simple: America, Jesus, Freedom. His strategy is well practiced: just tell any ethnic or socioeconomic group that they are the backbone of our country. His family looks great, he has hair to rival that of John Edwards, and the ladies seem to love him. It should be a slam-dunk decision, but he didn't count on Republican newbie Marty Huggins of Hammond, NC. Chubby, effeminate, and mustached, Zach Galifianakis's Marty will be easily recognizable to fans of his *Funny or Die* character from the *Between Two Ferns* online skits (from the prim Southern drawl to the patterned cardigans). He wants to do right by Hammond, but politics is a dirty game. Though he sees himself as a Mr. Smith, there are two men who pull the strings: the billionaire Motch brothers (Dan Aykroyd and John Lithgow), a watered-down version of Randolph and Mortimer Duke from 1983's *Trading Places*, who want to use Marty as a patsy to bring Chinese workers to

their American factories (they call this "insourcing"). As the preening, bombastic Neely gets embroiled in a sex scandal and brings the debates to vicious levels, Marty's naïveté and aw-shucks demeanor actually helps him in the polls, which only feed the fire.

As Huggins becomes more popular, he undergoes an extreme makeover of home, family, and pets (his Chinese pugs aren't American enough and thus are replaced by more virile Labradors). Dylan McDermott is his slick, smarmy best as the campaign manager who shoves Marty into manhood. Brady, on the other hand, is a loose cannon of alcohol, sex, and rage that sends his public relations teams (led by a underused Jason Sudeikis) into fits. Campaign commercials become more and more bizarre and obscene as the election nears, and both candidates resort to more outlandish tactics to sway their fickle voters.

In *The Campaign*, the political arena houses a game of fools. The values of American voters are reduced to likeability scales, and cable-news hosts respond to the candidates' immature or shocking behavior with the fervor of a Tweet analysis. Famous com-

mentators provide repeated cameos as themselves reporting on news that is not news. Brady responds to his scandals in press conferences by justifying his behavior with fuzzy logic and misquotes. Huggins stands on the simplest platform — cleaning house in Washington — to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

I should just sit back and laugh at all the f-bombs and fart jokes that appear in most scenes, but instead of a sharp skewering of modern-day politics, I witnessed two caricatures of the partisan stage. A far superior satire of political scandal and media manipulation is 1997's *Wag the Dog*, which had a grimace behind its humor because it was believable. The main characters in *The Campaign* were goofy and immature to the point of incredulity; you get the surface laughs but there's nothing to think about after the credits roll. The Capraesque ending solidified this opinion, only because the patronizing portrayal of the American public as too capricious and easily manipulated would never logically support it. In its quest to show the absurdity that can pervade the political race in the media, the film traded its intelligence for scat humor. (C)

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Mathematics

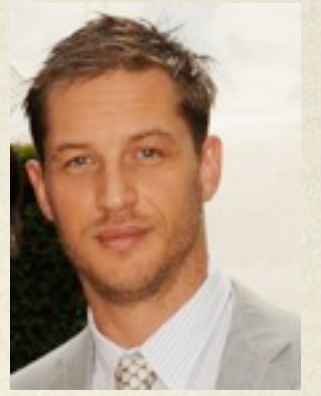
Math...in Film?



- ❖ How often have you heard this from students: *“When am I going to use this?”*
- ❖ In the entertainment business, they need trends analysts, publicists, agents, economists, and production designers who know how to study the box office and predict the best formula to make a film or star successful (or keep them that way).



Analyzing Trends activity

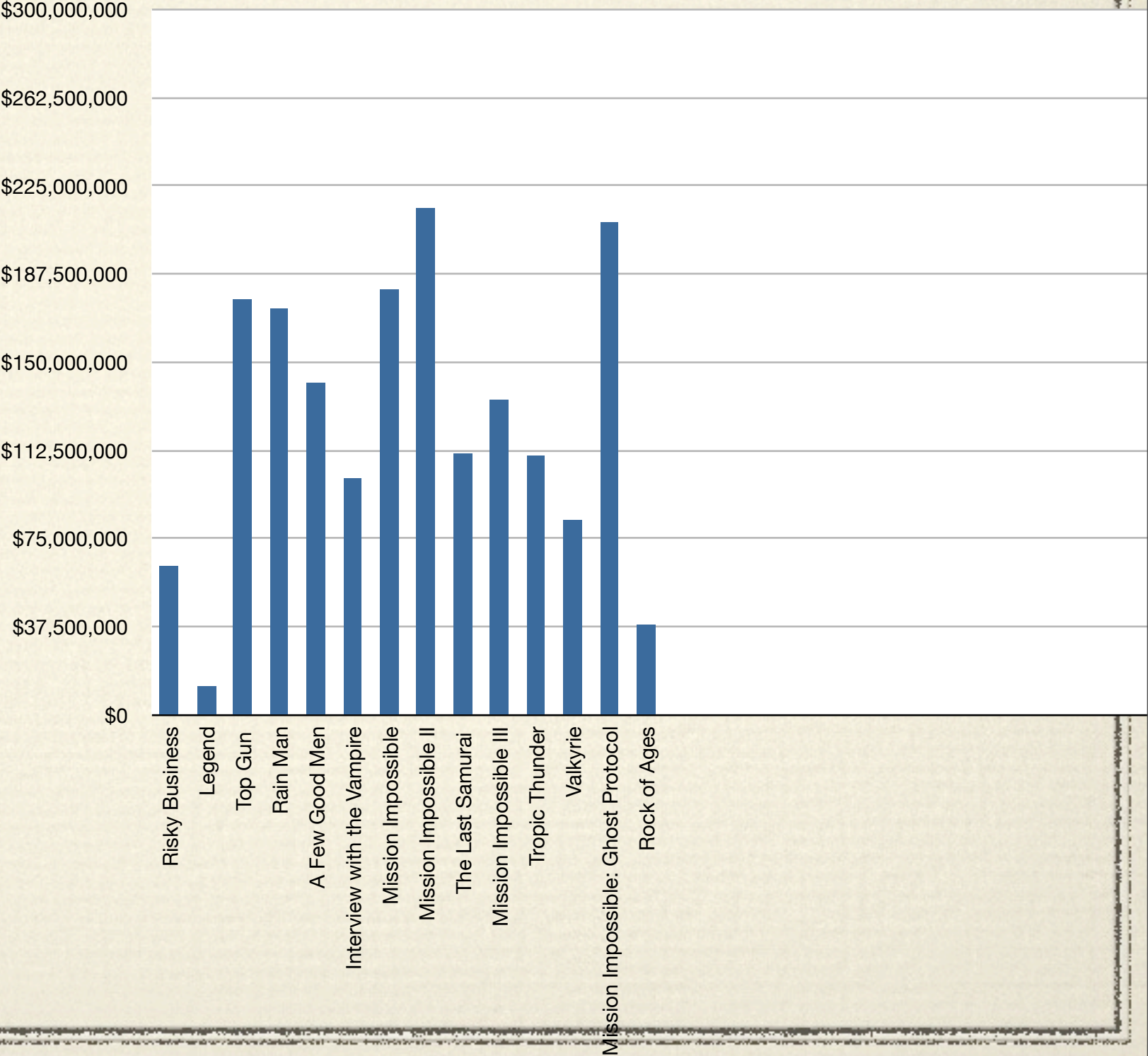


- ❖ **Step One:** Pick your favorite film star (preferably one that is still alive, but it doesn't really matter).
- ❖ **Step Two:** Open up their page on the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>)
- ❖ **Step Three:** Pick ten (or fifteen, whatever!) movies in which that star has been in over their career (try to space them out and include multiple genres).
- ❖ **Step Four:** Create a table with the movie title, year it came out, and box office gross (go to the Quick Links menu on the right, scroll to Box Office/Business, select the most current gross-usually at the top of the totals). Make sure the student does not confuse Gross profit with Opening Weekend receipts!

Analyzing Trends activity

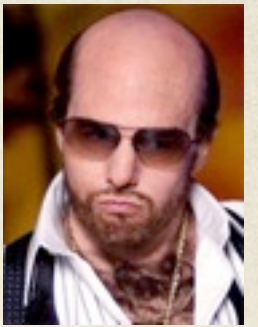
Tom Cruise - Box Office Grosses (1983

Tom Cruise Box Office Grosses (1983-2012)		
Risky Business	1983	63541777
Legend	1985	12297710
Top Gun	1986	176650237
Rain Man	1988	172825435
A Few Good Men	1992	141340178
Interview with the Vampire	1994	100689330
Mission Impossible	1996	180981856
Mission Impossible II	2000	215409889
The Last Samurai	2003	111110575
Mission Impossible III	2006	134029801
Tropic Thunder	2008	110416702
Valkyrie	2008	83077833
Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol	2011	209397903
Rock of Ages	2012	38509342





Analyzing Trends activity



- ❖ Students can **analyze** even more data using IMDB and **synthesize** this information to make predictions.
- ❖ *When was the star's biggest decade?*
- ❖ *What genre has he/she been most successful in? Least successful?*
- ❖ *In what locations have the most successful films been produced?*
- ❖ *Looking at the star's biography page, did the least successful films correspond with any negative event (i.e. divorce, scandal, illness) that may have impacted the box office. Likewise, did the most successful films correspond with any positive event (i.e. marriage, awards, births)?*
- ❖ *What upcoming projects are in pre-production or are currently filming with this star? Judging by genre, pop culture, star's reputation in the media, and current events, offer a hypothesis for the star's future success (or lack thereof).*

Science



Science is Cinematic, Too



- ❖ *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Fritz Lang); man vs. technology
- ❖ *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Robert Wise); global warfare, extraterrestrial invasion
- ❖ *On the Beach* (1959, dir. Stanley Kramer); nuclear war
- ❖ *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick); extraterrestrial contact, man vs. technology
- ❖ *Lorenzo's Oil* (1992, dir. George Miller); ALD research and treatment
- ❖ *Medicine Man* (1992, dir. John McTiernan): deforestation, cancer research
- ❖ *Contact* (1997, dir. Robert Zemeckis); extraterrestrial contact
- ❖ *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004, dir. Roland Emmerich); global warming

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So what now?

- ❖ Film is a medium (like television, the Internet, and music) through which ideas are spread and art is created. Not all film is art, but teachers can find good examples to use in their classroom in order to teach their students how to be active and critical viewers. Then, they will be able to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from lies, and art from drivel.

Film Links

- ❖ The Internet Movie Database
- ❖ AMC Filmsite - Glossary of Film Terms
- ❖ FilmEducation.org (UK site)